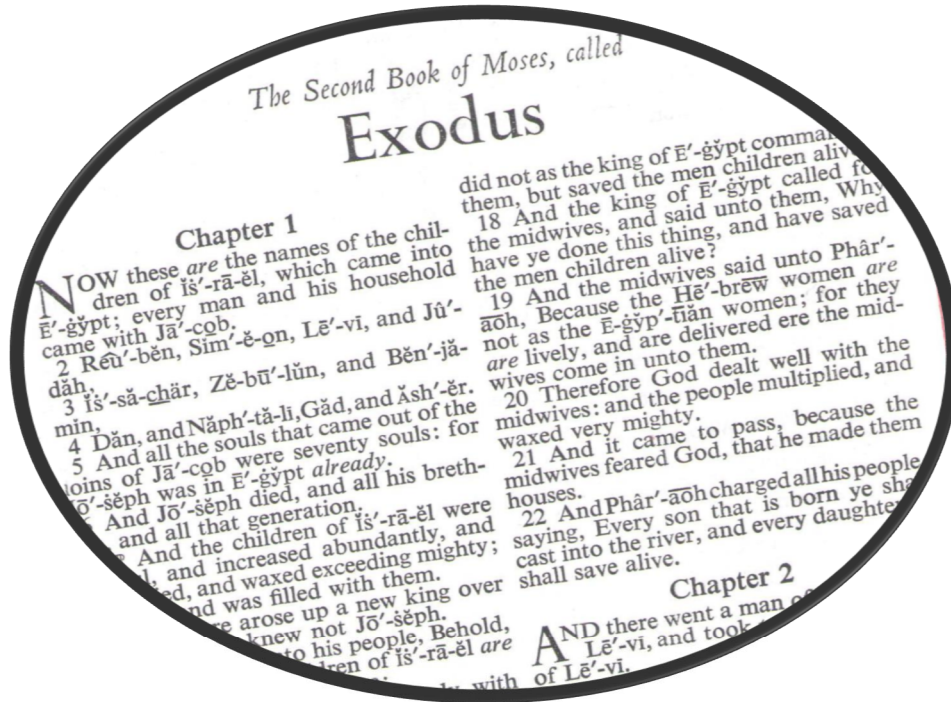


EXODUS – WEEK 7

THE PASSOVER



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Exodus 11:9–12:39 – The Passover

The LORD strikes Egypt, and Egypt's gods with the ultimate plague. He makes it clear that this is personal and that this should be remembered forever. This institutes the first holiday.

Then Pharaoh finally lets them go.

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Thank you.

Exodus 11:9–12:39 – The Passover
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1 Exodus 11:9-12:6 (NKJV)

But the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.” So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.’ ”

Christians, who are used to hearing about the Passover lamb, may be surprised to read that it can actually be either a sheep or a goat. The Hebrew word translated as “lamb” doesn’t distinguish, so the LORD takes time to make it clear. Either a kid or a lamb is OK, less than one year old and male only.

Goats are easier to care for than sheep and are a good source for food.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goat_meat

The other big surprise in this passage is that God declared the Passover as the start of the year. The modern traditional Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah (literally “head of the year” in Hebrew) is celebrated in the fall. They still call the Passover the first month of the year though.

Putting something first is an ancient way to give it emphasis. That’s true in language as well as table seating. This will be the first month of the year forever. God is setting up a holiday.

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday2.htm>

He doesn’t want this forgotten.

Forgetting the great events of the past is forgetting the great lessons of history. Holidays remind us, but serious study is better. These devotionals were created for that purpose.

But don’t limit your study to just these devotionals, or even just the Bible. Find a passion for Christian history. Some folks love reading about the early church fathers. Others find the Irish Saints a rich source of wisdom and understanding.

The Reformation gave us great teaching too, as did modern saints such as William Wilberforce and Jonathan Edwards. Then there’s CS Lewis – my favorite.

A passion for Christ inspires a passion for learning.

2 Exodus 12:7-13 (NKJV)

“*And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover.*

‘For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.’ ”

Two things are made especially clear in this passage. First, the Hebrew noun that’s translated as plague literally means blow or stroke. But this is the first time since Exodus 3:20 that God uses the Hebrew verb for “to strike” to describe His own actions – and He uses it twice.

He won’t just “bring” this plague; He will *strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt*. Also, *the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt*.

Second, he makes explicit that *against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment*. This plague won’t just strike the Egyptians and their livestock, it will strike their gods. The LORD is making his attack on the Egyptian religion explicit.

That has been the point all along – to show that YHVH is the one true God. Here’s one more, longer reference on YHVH’s takedown of the Egyptian gods.

http://www.padfield.com/acrobat/history/gods_of_egypt.pdf

The LORD gives great priority to His being the only object of worship. We’ll see this again, when The Ten Commandments gives priority to the ones about Him by listing them first.

People are so hungry for a relationship with God that they invent false ones. This offends the LORD, even as it makes people want to know the real thing. That’s a curious combination, but one of the secrets to evangelism. In Acts 17:22b-23 Paul applies some judo to the Athenians’ hunger for the real thing.

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:” (NKJV)

Never forget that we know what they’re looking for – even if they don’t.

3 Exodus 12:14-20 (NKJV)

‘So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.’ ”

This is the first holiday instituted by the LORD – even the Sabbath isn’t mentioned until Exodus 16:23. God hasn’t performed this miracle yet and already He’s instructing the Jews in how to celebrate it. The build-up is without precedent. If this were a human endeavor, it’d be oversold.

But it isn’t. Just as this miracle was built up to the Egyptians with a precise forecast, it is being built up to the Jews with a specific ceremony. Everything points to it being remembered.

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

Of course the Egyptian dictatorship doesn’t want it to be remembered, and the evidence appears to have been suppressed.

But the Jews are required to remember it and to celebrate it in the prescribed manner only. This is so important that the rule is given, *“For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”*

As always, God’s glory is the point.

Holiday literally means holy day; that’s the Old English root. Unfortunately, that original meaning has faded in our culture. We love our holidays, but they’re anything but holy.

Fortunately, Jews have done an impressive job of staying true to the meaning of holidays. Even Jews who could fairly be described as atheists practice Passover solemnly and with precision. They glorify God beautifully.

Oh how I wish we did as well with Easter.

4 Exodus 12:21-28 (NKJV)

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.’ ” So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

With the previous plagues, the Jews were automatically exempt just because of who they are and where they live. Now they have to do something to keep from getting struck – and it’s expensive and it’s gross. This messy procedure emphasizes the house-to-house nature of this plague. It’s their house that will be passed over, so it’s their house that they must mark.

It’s a good thing they’re about to abandon these houses. Splattering blood all over the entrance just kills the curb appeal.

In all seriousness, this is the beginning of a long road that leads to the cross. The grave nature of sin is a lesson that must be learned over-and-over. One of the ways that the LORD hammers this home is by grossing us out. Sin is so serious that only blood can atone for it.

While the Passover is far from the first bloody sacrifice in the Bible (see Gen. 22) it sets the standard. To keep from being stuck by *the destroyer*, each family must make their house look like a crime scene.

Our lives look like a crime scene too. We don’t see it because we don’t want to see it. Some sins, such as sins against our fellow man, are harder to ignore; there are too many witnesses.

But many sins (e.g. breaking commandments 1–5, 9 & 10) are easily covered up – and then forgotten. That makes the horror of our sin less horrifying. How can we break out of this cycle of complacency?

Somehow, we need to stop averting our eyes from our sins. The issue isn’t really our sins (plural); it’s our sin. The symptoms aren’t the issue. That takes this out of our hands; we can only control our actions.

Pray for God to reveal our sin to us and to gross us out by it, so that we will be moved to want to be cleansed. Ask the Holy Spirit to show us the darkness that lives within. Re-invite Jesus to take over as Lord of your life and purge you of iniquity.

5 Exodus 12:29-32 (NKJV)

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, “Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also.”

Yes, he really did end with, “*and bless me also.*” After all they’ve been through – especially after kicking them out saying, “*on the day you see my face you shall die*” – what could have possessed him to say something that stupid?

“Sure, I enslaved you and mistreated you and wouldn’t even give you a three day weekend to sacrifice to the LORD. Then you destroyed most of the country, so now I’m finally going to let you go. But no hard feelings, right?”

Wow. When God said He would harden Pharaoh’s heart, that just sounded like Pharaoh would be mean.

But there’s something more to this. Might he actually be schizophrenic or something?

No. The Bible never indicates that his behavior is anything more than just a hardened, sinful heart. There’s no demon possession and no clinical psychosis. He’s not hearing voices (other than his advisers pleading with him to get a clue).

He’s normal.

That’s scary. Pharaoh’s crazy behavior is just an extreme example of plain old sin. He’s not really any different from you and me. This highlights one of the key, recurring lessons of scripture.

Sin is crazy.

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! – Romans 7:24-25a (NKJV)

If that’s Paul writing about his saved self, what chance have we of getting through to the unsaved? Won’t their sin block all of our arguments?

Bingo. Conversion is clearly supernatural. It was supernatural with you, right?

6 Exodus 12:33-39 (NKJV)

And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

Everyone who lives near the coast should have a hurricane evacuation plan. Where would you go? How would you secure your home? What would you take?

The Israelites were going to the Sinai Peninsula. They were leaving home permanently. So, what would you take as refugees fleeing into a desert?

They took unleavened dough, plus gold, silver and clothing given to them by the Egyptians.

That’s ridiculous. The gold and silver is especially useless – like Thurston Howell’s riches on Gilligan’s Island. The passage gives the excuse that, “*they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.*”

OK, so they’re headed out into the desert pretty much unprepared. If God doesn’t provide for them, they’re dead.

Looks like another teachable moment coming.

Technology is a wonderful thing – a great gift from God – but we learn to depend on technology and forget Him. We turn to God for help only in situations that technology hasn’t mastered.

Cancer? We turn to God. Toothache? Technology is the answer. Dementia – God. Presbyopia – technology. God doesn’t provide the water; we just turn the handle.

Ask the LORD to renew our sense of awe and give us a humble perspective. Ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to our inadequacies. Hurricanes aren’t the only thing we need to be ready for.

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. – Luke 12:40 (NKJV)

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Who's your favorite Christian author?
2. How do you tap into a non-believers hidden hunger for God? (hint: listen)
3. How can we make our holidays more serious?
4. What lies at the heart of sin?
5. Did your conversion feel supernatural at the time?
6. What is your favorite modern device or technology?

Items for prayer: